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Chomsky on U.S. Jockeying With Russia

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GET YOUR FUCKING
HANDS OFF OUR
BODIES

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Will Demise of “Roe” Be a Death Knell for Contraception, Marriage Rights?

By Marjorie Cohn

In his explosive draft opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which was leaked to *Politico*, Samuel Alito overrules *Roe v. Wade* and *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. His draft holds that abortion is no longer a constitutional right and leaves the fate of those who seek abortions to the vagaries of state laws.

“We therefore hold that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion,” Alito writes. “Roe and Casey must be overruled, and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives.”

If four other members of the Supreme Court adopt Alito's draft, many other privacy rights we hold dear will be in jeopardy. They include the rights to contraception and

same-sex marriage, among others.

In December, Clarence Thomas, Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett voted with Alito after oral argument and they continue to hold that position, according to *Politico*. That's a five-member majority if they sign on to Alito's draft opinion by the end of June.

Nearly a half century ago, the Supreme Court held in *Roe* that the Constitution protects “a woman's decision whether or not to terminate her pregnancy.” The court relied on longstanding precedents holding that “the Fourteenth Amendment's concept of personal liberty” prohibits governmental interference with personal decisions about marriage, contraception, procreation, family relationships, child-rearing and education.

Twenty years later, in *Casey*, the court reaffirmed the central holding of *Roe*—that a pregnant woman has the right to an abortion before the fetus becomes viable (at about 23 weeks of pregnancy). *Casey* highlighted the “settled” principle that “the Constitution places limits on a State's right to interfere with a person's most basic decisions about family and parenthood ... as well as bodily integrity.”

The court cited *Casey* with approval in *Washington v.*

Glucksberg, in which it listed the right to “abortion” with the rights “to marry,” “to use contraception,” “to have children” and “to bodily integrity,” which are recognized in a “long line of cases” that interpret the Due Process Clause. It requires due process before the government can deprive someone of life, liberty or property.

In *Lawrence v. Texas*, the court relied on *Casey* to hold that states cannot criminalize “homosexual conduct.” The *Lawrence* court said that the “right to liberty under the Due Process Clause” guarantees “a realm of personal liberty that the government may not enter.”

The court used those same precedents to hold in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that the Constitution protects same-sex marriage: “Like choices concerning contraception, family relationships, procreation, and childrearing, decisions concerning marriage are among the most intimate that an individual can make,” and are therefore “inherent in the concept of individual autonomy” protected by the Due Process Clause.

In his draft opinion in *Dobbs*, Alito writes, “We emphasize that our decision concerns the constitutional right to abortion and no other right. Nothing in this opinion should be understood to cast

doubt on precedents that do not concern abortion.”

Nevertheless, Alito eviscerates the fundamental underpinnings of the rights to contraception, sexual freedom and same-sex marriage. He holds that abortion, which is not specifically mentioned in the Constitution, is not “deeply rooted in this nation’s history and tradition” and is not “implicit in the concept of ordered liberty.”

“On the contrary,” Alito writes, “an unbroken tradition of prohibiting abortion on pain of criminal punishment persisted from the earliest days of the common law until 1973 [when *Roe* was decided].”

Alito specifically criticizes *Lawrence* and *Obergefell*, writing that they are not “deeply rooted in history.” But as Erwin Chemerinsky, dean of Berkeley Law School, noted in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Unless the court is going to repudiate all of the other privacy rights, it is impossible to deny that laws prohibiting abortion also intrude on a woman’s liberty.”

In his draft opinion, Alito “disavows the entire line of jurisprudence upon which *Roe* rests: the existence of ‘unenumerated rights’ that safeguard individual autonomy from state invasion,” Mark Joseph Stern wrote at *Slate*. “Alito asserts that any

such right must be ‘deeply rooted’ in the nation’s history and tradition, and access to abortion has no such roots.”

If the court overrules *Roe*, around half the states will outlaw or severely limit abortion. Thirteen states with “trigger laws” would immediately ban abortion. Five states that have pre-*Roe* abortion bans could once again enforce them. And 14 states would ban abortions before fetal viability. Prohibition of and restrictions on abortion would disproportionately affect poor women and people of color.

People suffering early miscarriages or ectopic pregnancies could be adversely affected if *Roe* is overturned. Fertility procedures such as in-vitro fertilization (IVF), egg extractions and stem cell procedures could be outlawed.

Other “unenumerated” rights not specifically listed in the Constitution would be jeopardized, including the right to travel, the right to vote and the right to interracial marriage.

The ramifications of a Supreme Court decision overruling *Roe* are unfathomable. Not only will people be denied the right to have an abortion, those who need other medical procedures would be at risk. And privacy rights we now take for granted could

evaporate.

As the United States moves, terrifyingly, toward a Christian theocracy that has methodically and finally seized control of the Supreme Court, we must remain vigilant and take action. That includes speaking out, contacting Congress members and the White House, writing op-eds and letters to the editor, and demonstrating like thousands of people are doing across the country. **Z**

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With Roe on the Ropes, Students Stage Nationwide Walk-

outs

By Brett Wilkins

College and high school students from coast to coast walked out of classrooms and off campuses to defend reproductive freedom in the wake of the revelation that the U.S. Supreme Court is set to overturn *Roe v. Wade* in what would arguably be the biggest rights rollback in American history.

“I’m very terrified,” said Josie Whitmore, a freshman at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst. “It starts with one thing being overturned and we’re going to keep being oppressed. The laws are not working in our favor. They’re working against us at this point.”

Nicolas Cardona, another Amherst student, said, “The right of abortion is a fundamental human right and it has historically been won by a very militant struggle.”

“This is affecting the world,” Cardona added. “Working-class women are organizing themselves and fighting in the streets for this right, and the working-class women in this country want to do the same.”

Students at Stony Brook University on Long Island said they organized a demonstration to mobilize outrage

“into productive action to draw greater attention to the perilous position that our reproductive rights are in” and to urge the school to “improve the accessibility and availability of contraceptives on campus.”

In New York City, 15-year-old protester Anna Hunt told Reuters that “my rights are being threatened, and I came here because I’m hoping to not allow these government officials, who think they have control over my body, to do what they’re doing and take us back 50 years.”

Jean Remarque, a young LGBTQ+ Black man protesting in New York, told Reuters that “the woman has the right to make choices and decisions for her body. No one should... tell a woman what they can and cannot do.”

Protesters at Edward Little High School in Auburn, Maine, said the opinions of young people should be taken seriously.

“People might look at us like we’re young, but I genuinely feel like we can make the most change,” student Cassie Gamache told WGME. “Most of us are voting next year or this year.”

Addressing a crowd of 150 students and staff attending a protest at the College of Wooster in Ohio, transgender student Cody Clark told anti-choice forces to “keep

your policies off of women’s bodies.”

“I have a friend who would have died without an abortion,” Clark added. “I’m here out of righteous anger, but am I also here out of love for everyone here and for myself.”

Hundreds of students at three Louisville, Kentucky high schools—including the alma mater of staunchly anti-choice Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY.)—walked out of their classrooms at noon.

The student walkouts follow nationwide demonstrations on the prior evening involving thousands of reproductive rights defenders angry over a leaked Supreme Court draft opinion written by Justice Samuel Alito and joined by four of the court’s right-wing justices that declares *Roe v. Wade* “egregiously wrong from the start.”

“We therefore hold that the Constitution does not confer a right to abortion,” wrote Alito for the majority, “...and the authority to regulate abortion must be returned to the people and their elected representatives.”

Speaking at Kent State University in northeastern Ohio, Fiona Fisher, an organizer with Students for a Democratic Society, noted that “if *Roe* is overturned, 26 U.S. states will likely enact bans on abortion.”

“We call on all working-class, oppressed, and progressive people to take to the streets and fight for our lives,” she added, “in some cases literally.” Z

With Third of America Lost to Hate, Is It High Time to Move On?

By Thom Hartmann

It’s time to stop normalizing and accommodating the white supremacists among us. They may be a third of America, but they’re the lost third, longing for return to a time we will never revisit.

Instead of looking forward, they’re stuck to a past that will never be revived, no matter how many elections they rig or people they terrorize or kill.

The America I was born into and grew up in as a kid was a very different place from today. In the 1950s the country was firmly under the control of straight white men:

- Black people (and oth-

er minorities, varying by region) were confined to certain parts of town and were routinely beaten, arrested, or even killed for stepping into whites-only areas.

- In 1951 only about 15% of Black people were successful in registering to vote in all of the former Confederate states.
- With few exceptions, the only minority faces seen in media were those portrayed as either buffoons or criminals.
- Abortion was illegal, and in many states you could go to jail, even if you were married, for possessing birth control of any sort, including condoms, in your own home. IUD’s and birth control pills did not exist.
- Schools, restaurants, hotels, and most private businesses were racially segregated.
- Women (even white women) couldn’t sign a contract, get a credit card or open a bank account in their own names without the signature of a father or husband.
- Immigration into America was regulated to maintain the country’s racial balance.

- Gays and lesbians were routinely beaten, imprisoned, raped, and murdered with no consequence to their tormentors.
- Police had carte blanche to terrorize and kill minorities of all types.

Since then, a lot has changed:

- The browning of America began in a big way in the 1960s with egalitarian changes to our immigration, voting, and public accommodations laws.
- The Women’s Rights movement picked up steam after the legalization in 1961 of birth control pills and *Roe v Wade* in 1973, although Republicans have successfully blocked the Equal Rights Amendment to this day.
- Full citizenship for LGBTQ people picked up in the 1990s and was finally realized (in law, at least) when Vice President Biden and then President Obama endorsed gay marriage and the Supreme Court ratified it in June of 2015.

Throughout the past 30 or so years as the larger of these changes have been ce-

mented into law and culture, straight white male backlash has grown to the point where, today, white male supremacy is the core product sold on rightwing television and hate-talk radio/podcasts.

That backlash has gone from passive resistance against integration, to the Tea Party, to openly declaring Barack Obama “not a real American,” to rightwing media embracing the “Great Replacement Theory” first championed by “America First” actual Nazis 80 years ago.

An effort to realize our nation’s founding creed that “all men are created equal” has been twisted in the minds of Trump followers into a sinister plot to deny straight white men their God-given role in American society. Now it’s being used to justify political violence (57% of Republicans today say January 6th was “patriotic”), election-rigging, and court-packing.

This idea that Democrats, in addition to drinking the blood of children and embracing “international” Jewish villains (like George Soros), are actively working to “replace” straight white people with people of color and/or LGBTQ folks is particularly poisonous and virulent.

Tucker Carlson, with the approval of the heir to Rupert Murdoch’s billions, began

this in a big way during prime time on Fox “News.” On April 8th, for example, he told his viewers: “[T]he Democratic Party is trying to replace the current electorate, the voters now casting ballots, with new people, more obedient voters from the Third World.”

Four days later, Carlson explained to his mostly white Fox audience the Great Replacement Theory and how, in his opinion, Democrats were its main advocates: “Demographic change,” he said, “is the key to the Democratic Party’s political ambitions. In order to win and maintain power, Democrats plan to change the population of the country. They’re no longer trying to win you over with their program. ... They don’t even really care about your vote anymore. Their goal is to make you irrelevant.”

On April 15, Carlson echoed the Nazi theory that the pinnacle of evolution was, as Hitler preached, the white (Aryan) race: “Acknowledge the reality of evolutionary biology,” he demanded, sliding into the evening news buzzwords that every white supremacist in America instantly recognized. “It is real.”

He added: “They are changing everything, whether we like it or not. A new language, new values, new biology, new curricula, new social mores and hiring standards and body

types. A brand-new national population. And then, because that is still not enough change, a whole new system of government. ... What will the consequences of that change, of that revolution be? In your bones, you know the answer. It’s terrifying, and it does not have to happen.”

Fox’s Laura Ingraham also said it out loud: “Of this my friends you can be sure, your views on immigration will have zero impact and zero influence on a House dominated by Democrats who want to replace you, the American voters, with newly amnestied citizens and an ever increasing number of chain migrants.”

Now the chief of the Border Patrol union, Brandon Judd, is even repeating the America-For-Whites-Only theme, saying: “I believe that they’re trying to change the demographics of the electorate; that’s what I believe they’re doing,”

After the last presidential election, white supremacists conspired to keep their leader, Donald Trump, in office by, among other things, trying to murder the Vice President and Speaker of the House in their attempted coup.

This virulent form of white supremacy has also spread to our churches. When PRRI asked if Trump had “encouraged white supremacists,” a

majority of Black (75%) and Hispanic (68%) churchgoers said yes. But, the pollsters found, fewer than “half of white mainline Protestants (43%) and white Catholics (43%) and only 26% of white evangelical Protestants share this view.”

These straight white “Christians” cheered when Trump began the “Birther” movement, terrorized refugee children (many of whom are now lost to trafficking or unknown adoptions), referred to majority-Black nations as “shithole countries,” engaged in slurs like “Mexican judge,” and repeatedly referred to Black women in Congress as “crazy.”

They’ve been told that as minorities increase their roles in media, politics, and the mainstream of American life and business, that must mean that white opportunities are similarly reduced. They see American society and the distribution of jobs, wealth, and power within it as a zero-sum game, which it very much is not.

Most of the old-timers among them have always been racists; the new adherents to the white supremacist ideology were evangelized on unregulated social media and by rightwing hate radio and TV.

They’ve so completely taken over the Republican Party

that white supremacist senators felt empowered to attack a highly qualified but Black female judge as pro-pedophile. CBS just put one of them on its payroll. They’re purging the party of old-line “fiscal conservatives” like Liz Cheney; and the savagely bigoted and anti-gay Ron DeSantis is their new savior.

These people are lost. By and large, there is no hope to redeem or awaken them, and we should stop trying.

Americans and our institutions should stop normalizing them, as if being a member of the GOP means a person is suddenly above also being a white supremacist bigot. Racists should no longer be able to hide behind the sheet of “just being political.”

A big step forward happened this past weekend when *The New York Times* published an extraordinary exposé of Tucker Carlson’s “most racist show in the history of cable news.”

While programming like Carlson’s would have been normal in most of America in the 1950s, it should have no place in our more diverse nation in 2022, regardless of how much money it makes Fox’s Australian owners.

Racists and bigots must be called out, labeled, and shunned, no matter how wealthy or powerful they may be.

This is particularly important on the Sunday TV political shows, where they routinely show up and are almost never confronted with meaningful questioning. (There’s a reason Trevor Noah chose to call out Chuck Todd...)

And then we must turn to the most important work: getting about the business of governing and moving forward, rebuilding this country from the wreckage of 40 years of Reaganism, while leaving his and Trump’s bigoted followers to marinate alone in their own putrid stew. **Z**

This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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Imperial Nostalgia and its Perils

By Lawrence S. Wittner

Although great empires rank among the most powerful engines of world history, they are also among the most dangerous, especially as they brood over their de-

cline.

The Russian empire provides a striking illustration of this phenomenon. Traditionally referred to as the “prison of nations,” Russia, in its Czarist and Soviet phases, controlled a vast Eurasian land mass of subject peoples. But the implosion of the empire in 1991 left Russian leaders adrift, uncertain whether to steer their nation toward a more modest role in the world or to revive what they considered their country’s past imperial glory. Ultimately, under the leadership of Vladimir Putin, they decided on the latter, employing Russian military power to attack neighboring Georgia, win a civil war in Syria, annex Crimea, and instigate a separatist revolt in Ukraine’s Donbas region. This February, Putin launched a military invasion of Ukraine, with horrendous consequences.

Imperial nostalgia has long pervaded Putin’s thinking. As early as 2005, he told the Russian parliament that the collapse of the Soviet empire was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century” and “a genuine tragedy” for “the Russian people.” In July 2021, he published a long historical article (“On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians”) contending that there had never been a Ukraine independent of Rus-

sia. During a televised address on February 21, 2022, Putin again invoked the past, claiming that Ukraine was “historically Russian land.” In fact, of course, a Ukrainian nation, with its own language and culture, had existed for many centuries and had been ruled by a variety of nations during that period.

Disconsolate Russian officials have their counterparts in Britain. In the aftermath of World War II, as decolonization gathered momentum throughout the far-flung British Empire, the guardians of the Old Order worked to suppress independence struggles and bitterly lamented the decline of imperial grandeur. In 1956, Prime Minister Anthony Eden, angered by the policies of Egypt’s revolutionary leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser, launched a British invasion, along with France and Israel, to retake control of the Suez Canal. Blocked in their reassertion of imperial power by the Soviet and U.S. governments, British officials felt deeply humiliated. And the fact that Britannia no longer ruled the waves continued to sting. In 2002, Boris Johnson—currently Britain’s prime minister—wrote contemptuously that Africa “may be a blot, but it is not a blot upon our conscience. The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we

are not in charge any more.”

The French government, too, grew increasingly dismayed in the postwar era as the Algerians revolted, the Vietnamese routed France’s armed forces, and its empire disintegrated. Desperate to fend off imperial collapse, French officials proposed retaining their colonial relationships through a French Union. In 1958, when the people of Guinea voted, instead, for independence, the embittered French government turned to sabotaging the ungrateful nation by destroying government records, flooding the country with fake banknotes, and even removing the lightbulbs from government buildings. The failure of their war to subdue Algeria inspired an even greater backlash, including uprisings by French military officers who overturned the French government, though to no avail. In later years, disgruntled French military veterans and staunch imperialists became the backbone of the French rightwing.

Though the United States, originally a thin string of colonies on the Atlantic coast, is less often regarded as an imperial nation, the reality is that, through wars and treaties, it dramatically expanded across the North American continent and beyond. By the end of World War II,

it was one of the largest nations on earth, as well as the richest and most powerful. Even so, as other countries recovered from the war and reasserted themselves, fears arose among Americans that they were “losing” nations around the world to Communists, revolutionaries, and nationalists. This anxiety inspired U.S. military intervention in numerous lands, including Vietnam, where, as Lyndon Johnson remarked, the United States could not allow itself to be defeated by a “raggedy-ass, little fourth-rate country.” Although Donald Trump is best-known for promising to “Make America Great Again,” this backward-looking incantation was also employed by earlier presidents to rally Americans behind reviving the nation’s Golden Age.

China’s leaders—especially Xi Jinping—have reached deeper into the past to locate its era of imperial glory. Shortly after taking power in 2012 as Communist Party Secretary, Xi lauded his nation’s five thousand years of history and its “indelible contribution” to world civilization. Condemning China’s more recent years of humiliation at the hands of the colonial powers, he vowed “to achieve the Chinese dream of great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.” Xi amplified

on this theme in 2018, when he declared that “we are resolved to fight the bloody battle against our enemies . . . to take our place in the world.” Again promising “the great restoration of the Chinese nation,” he used the word “great” 35 times. And Xi has managed to turn China into a major power, surpassed only by the United States in economic and military strength. He also developed a much more assertive foreign policy, as well as a dangerous military confrontation with the United States in Asia.

The ubiquity and perils of this imperial nostalgia highlight the need to create an international security system to replace today’s international anarchy. Fortunately, the United Nations presents a useful starting point for an international order no longer plagued by imperialism or other forms of international aggression. Although the nations of the world have given the world organization the responsibility to protect international security, they have failed to provide it with the power to do so. Therefore, as we confront a planet riven by international conflict, let us consider how dreams of imperial grandeur might be discarded and how a strengthened United Nations might be used to fashion a more secure and cooperative world. **Z**

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Why Canceling Student Debt Is a Matter of Racial Justice

By Sonali Kolhatkar

“If America has a cold, then the Black community has the flu,” said India Walton, explaining how the burden of student debt is disproportionately borne by African Americans. Walton, who famously campaigned on a socialist platform to beat a Democratic incumbent in last year’s mayoral primary race in Buffalo, New York, is now a senior strategic organizer with RootsAction.org leading the organization’s “Without Student Debt” campaign. “Forty-seven million Americans carry student debt, but the burden of the debt falls disproportionately on Black and Brown people,” she said.

According to the Education Data Initiative, out of the 47 million Americans that Wal-

ton cited, about 92 percent of them (43 million Americans) have borrowed more than \$1.6 trillion from the U.S. government in order to access higher education. The average federal loan size per borrower is \$37,113, but when factoring in loans from private borrowers, that number rises to more than \$40,000.

Because of how the income and wealth gap is so starkly delineated along racial lines, it’s not at all surprising that Black and Brown students are disproportionately represented among student borrowers. Women are also the majority of borrowers. Those at the intersection of race and gender are most impacted. “The average Black woman carries more than \$35,000 in student debt,” said Walton.

The simple reason why nearly one-third of all undergraduates borrow money from the federal government in order to attend college or university is that the cost of higher education has risen dramatically. According to one in-depth analysis, it has risen nearly five times faster than inflation over the past half-century. And, if the price tag of higher education were in line with inflation, it would cost only about \$10,000 or \$20,000 per year to attend a public or private four-year school, respectively. Instead, while public universities are

still relatively less pricey, private schools can cost upward of \$50,000 a year.

Since wages haven’t kept up with the skyrocketing costs of higher education, student debt has ballooned as borrowers are unable to pay back the loans. It’s no wonder that some people consider suicide as they face the grim prospects of being unable to pay back tens of thousands of dollars.

It turns out that student debt, just like medical debt or the inability to pay increasing rents, is just another feature of a capitalist, market-driven system designed to ensure the health of Wall Street over the wellness of people. And—it bears repeating—those financial stresses affect people of color the most. “It’s a stain on this, the wealthiest nation in the world, that we are not even able to provide basic services to our people,” said Walton.

Meanwhile, since his election, President Joe Biden has tantalized debt-burdened Americans with indications that he might keep his campaign promises of forgiving federal student loans. His initial campaign promise of forgiving \$50,000 in loans was dramatically downgraded to only \$10,000. Walton said, “what we’re asking for, what we’re demanding, is that all federally guaranteed student

debt be canceled,” not just a portion.

Corporate media outlets are predictably doing their part to help Biden water down the idea of debt forgiveness. Even though only a minority of Americans feel that it is unfair to forgive the loans of some people because others have found ways to pay them back, media outlets have elevated this talking point.

Walton said this argument is “not valid.” Citing the high cost of colleges and low wages, she said, “we’re just not in the same economic conditions as people were, who seem to tout having paid off their student loan[s].”

Additionally, some media pundits are labeling the demand to erase student debt as a radical idea, akin to “Defund the Police,” or “Abolish ICE” (none of these are in fact radical). David Frum writing in the *Atlantic* claimed that the call to erase student debt is a “trap” laid for Biden by leftist activists. He bizarrely compared it to the right-wing culture wars being waged by GOP leaders like Gov. Ron DeSantis of Florida.

How is DeSantis’ targeting of transgender youth to win political points from his rabidly homophobic and transphobic voter base anything like Biden erasing the student debt of 43 million Americans? If anything, the GOP

may be opposed to debt forgiveness precisely because such a move would benefit disproportionately impacted Black and Brown people.

Americans are worried about the state of the economy, and are blaming Biden for it. In such a context, student debt forgiveness is a no-brainer. Not only would it amount to a retroactive government subsidy for higher education—a far more constructive use of tax dollars than, say, the fossil fuel industry—it would also amount to an economic stimulus. With fewer loan payments to make, borrowers would have more income freed up to spend on necessities. At a time of high inflation, any extra income helps household finances.

As prospects for Democrats to hold on to their slim House and Senate majorities in the November midterms appear grim, it would seem to be an obvious electoral tactic, if not a morally sound decision, to forgive the student debt that has hampered the lives of so many people, and especially Black and Brown Americans. Polls show there is overwhelming support for doing so.

The response from the GOP does not go beyond the now-cliché label of “socialism” to describe debt forgiveness. Republicans are also claiming that Biden lacks

the legal right to cancel the debt via executive order—a laughable position in light of former President Donald Trump’s constant executive overreach. But, in response to Republicans introducing a recent bill to thwart Biden’s executive authority to cancel student debt, analysts have pointed out that the Republican Party has inadvertently admitted that the president does indeed have the legal standing to do so.

“The Higher Education Act of 1964 gives the president the power to direct his secretary of education to cancel debt broadly,” said Walton. Indeed, for the past two years, Biden has used this same authority to pause the repayment of federal student debt in light of pandemic-related financial hardships.

Still, that hasn’t stopped Obama-era Education Department general counsel Charlie Rose from claiming that presidential action to erase student debt is legally questionable and suggesting that loan servicing companies might sue the administration.

“I’m concerned,” said Walton. “I don’t know what the reason for not [doing] broad cancellation [of debt] would be.” Republicans never seem to waver in their singular focus on ensuring that wealth flows upward and into the hands of wealthy white elites.

And Democrats, far too often, fail to provide a countervailing force in the other direction. **Z**

This article was produced by Economy for All, a project of the Independent Media Institute.

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How Could the U.S. Help to Bring Peace to Ukraine?

By Nicolas J. S. Davies

On April 21st, President Biden announced new shipments of weapons to Ukraine, at a cost of \$800 million to U.S. taxpayers. On April 25th, Secretaries Blinken and Austin announced over \$300 million more military aid. The United States has now spent \$3.7 billion on weapons for Ukraine since the Russian invasion,

bringing total U.S. military aid to Ukraine since 2014 to about \$6.4 billion.

The top priority of Russian airstrikes in Ukraine has been to destroy as many of these weapons as possible before they reach the front lines of the war, so it is not clear how militarily effective these massive arms shipments really are. The other leg of U.S. “support” for Ukraine is its economic and financial sanctions against Russia, whose effectiveness is also highly uncertain.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres is visiting Moscow and Kyiv to try to kickstart negotiations for a ceasefire and a peace agreement. Since hopes for earlier peace negotiations in Belarus and Turkey have been washed away in a tide of military escalation, hostile rhetoric and politicized war crimes accusations, Secretary General Guterres’ mission may now be the best hope for peace in Ukraine.

This pattern of early hopes for a diplomatic resolution that are quickly dashed by a war psychosis is not unusual. Data on how wars end from the Uppsala Conflict Data Program (UCDP) make it clear that the first month of a war offers the best chance for a negotiated peace agreement. That window has now passed for Ukraine.

An analysis of the UCDP data by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) found that 44% of wars that end within a month end in a ceasefire and peace agreement rather than the decisive defeat of either side, while that decreases to 24% in wars that last between a month and a year. Once wars rage on into a second year, they become even more intractable and usually last more than ten years.

CSIS fellow Benjamin Jensen, who analyzed the UCDP data, concluded, “The time for diplomacy is now. The longer a war lasts absent concessions by both parties, the more likely it is to escalate into a protracted conflict... In addition to punishment, Russian officials need a viable diplomatic off-ramp that addresses the concerns of all parties.”

To be successful, diplomacy leading to a peace agreement must meet five basic conditions:

First, all sides must gain benefits from the peace agreement that outweigh what they think they can gain by war.

U.S. and allied officials are waging an information war to promote the idea that Russia is losing the war and that Ukraine can militarily defeat Russia, even as some officials admit that that could take several years.

In reality, neither side will benefit from a protracted war that lasts for many months or years. The lives of millions of Ukrainians will be lost and ruined, while Russia will be mired in the kind of military quagmire that both the U.S.S.R. and the United States already experienced in Afghanistan, and that most recent U.S. wars have turned into.

In Ukraine, the basic outlines of a peace agreement already exist. They are: withdrawal of Russian forces; Ukrainian neutrality between NATO and Russia; self-determination for all Ukrainians (including in Crimea and Donbas); and a regional security agreement that protects everyone and prevents new wars.

Both sides are essentially fighting to strengthen their hand in an eventual agreement along those lines. So how many people must die before the details can be worked out across a negotiating table instead of over the rubble of Ukrainian towns and cities?

Second, mediators must be impartial and trusted by both sides.

The United States has monopolized the role of mediator in the Israeli-Palestinian crisis for decades, even as it openly backs and arms one side and abuses its UN veto to

prevent international action. This has been a transparent model for endless war.

Turkey has so far acted as the principal mediator between Russia and Ukraine, but it is a NATO member that has supplied drones, weapons and military training to Ukraine. Both sides have accepted Turkey's mediation, but can Turkey really be an honest broker?

The UN could play a legitimate role, as it is doing in Yemen, where the two sides are finally observing a two-month ceasefire. But even with the UN's best efforts, it has taken years to negotiate this fragile pause in the war.

Third, the agreement must address the main concerns of all parties to the war.

In 2014, the U.S.-backed coup and the massacre of anti-coup protesters in Odessa led to declarations of independence by the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. The first Minsk Protocol agreement in September 2014 failed to end the ensuing civil war in Eastern Ukraine. A critical difference in the Minsk II agreement in February 2015 was that DPR and LPR representatives were included in the negotiations, and it succeeded in ending the worst fighting and preventing a major new outbreak of war for 7 years.

There is another party that

was largely absent from the negotiations in Belarus and Turkey, people who make up half the population of Russia and Ukraine: the women of both countries. While some of them are fighting, many more can speak as victims, civilian casualties and refugees from a war unleashed mainly by men. The voices of women at the table would be a constant reminder of the human costs of war and the lives of women and children that are at stake.

Even when one side militarily wins a war, the grievances of the losers and unresolved political and strategic issues often sow the seeds of new outbreaks of war in the future. As Benjamin Jensen of CSIS suggested, the desires of U.S. and Western politicians to punish and gain strategic advantage over Russia must not be allowed to prevent a comprehensive resolution that addresses the concerns of all sides and ensures a lasting peace.

Fourth, there must be a step-by-step roadmap to a stable and lasting peace that all sides are committed to.

The Minsk II agreement led to a fragile ceasefire and established a roadmap to a political solution. But the Ukrainian government and parliament, under Presidents Poroshenko and then Zelensky, failed to take the next steps that Poro-

shenko agreed to in Minsk in 2015: to pass laws and constitutional changes to permit independent, internationally-supervised elections in the DPR and LPR, and to grant them autonomy within a federalized Ukrainian state.

Now that these failures have led to Russian recognition of the DPR and LPR's independence, a new peace agreement must revisit and resolve their status, and that of Crimea, in ways that all sides will be committed to, whether that is through the autonomy promised in Minsk II or formal, recognized independence from Ukraine.

A sticking point in the peace negotiations in Turkey was Ukraine's need for solid security guarantees to ensure that Russia won't invade it again. The UN Charter formally protects all countries from international aggression, but it has repeatedly failed to do so when the aggressor, usually the United States, wields a Security Council veto. So how can a neutral Ukraine be reassured that it will be safe from attack in the future? And how can all parties be sure that the others will stick to the agreement this time?

Fifth, outside powers must not undermine the negotiation or implementation of a peace agreement.

Although the United States and its NATO allies are not

active warring parties in Ukraine, their role in provoking this crisis through NATO expansion and the 2014 coup, then supporting Kyiv's abandonment of the Minsk II agreement and flooding Ukraine with weapons, make them an "elephant in the room" that will cast a long shadow over the negotiating table, wherever that is.

In April 2012, former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan drew up a six-point plan for a UN-monitored ceasefire and political transition in Syria. But at the very moment that the Annan plan took effect and UN ceasefire monitors were in place, the United States, NATO and their Arab monarchist allies held three "Friends of Syria" conferences, where they pledged virtually unlimited financial and military aid to the Al Qaeda-linked rebels they were backing to overthrow the Syrian government. This encouraged the rebels to ignore the ceasefire, and led to another decade of war for the people of Syria.

The fragile nature of peace negotiations over Ukraine make success highly vulnerable to such powerful external influences. The United States backed Ukraine in a confrontational approach to the civil war in Donbas instead of supporting the terms of the Minsk II agreement, and this

has led to war with Russia. Now Turkey's Foreign Minister, Mevlut Cavosoglu, has told CNN Turk that unnamed NATO members "want the war to continue," in order to keep weakening Russia.

Conclusion

How the United States and its NATO allies act now and in the coming months will be crucial in determining whether Ukraine is destroyed by years of war, like Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Syria and Yemen, or whether this war ends quickly through a diplomatic process that brings peace, security and stability to the people of Russia, Ukraine and their neighbors.

If the United States wants to help restore peace in Ukraine, it must diplomatically support peace negotiations, and make it clear to its ally, Ukraine, that it will support any concessions that Ukrainian negotiators believe are necessary to clinch a peace agreement with Russia.

Whatever mediator Russia and Ukraine agree to work with to try to resolve this crisis, the United States must give the diplomatic process its full, unreserved support, both in public and behind closed doors. It must also ensure that its own actions do not undermine the peace

process in Ukraine as they did the Annan plan in Syria in 2012.

One of the most critical steps that U.S. and NATO leaders can take to provide an incentive for Russia to agree to a negotiated peace is to commit to lifting their sanctions if and when Russia complies with a withdrawal agreement. Without such a commitment, the sanctions will quickly lose any moral or practical value as leverage over Russia, and will be only an arbitrary form of collective punishment against its people, and against poor people everywhere who can no longer afford food to feed their families. As the de facto leader of the NATO military alliance, the U.S. position on this question will be crucial.

So policy decisions by the United States will have a critical impact on whether there will soon be peace in Ukraine, or only a much longer and bloodier war. The test for U.S. policymakers, and for Americans who care about the people of Ukraine, must be to ask which of these outcomes U.S. policy choices are likely to lead to. **Z**

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CJ. Polychroniou: *The war in Ukraine is causing unimaginable human suffering, but it is also having global economic consequences and is terrible news for the fight against global warming. Indeed, as a result of rising energy costs and concerns about energy security, decarbonization efforts have taken a back seat. In the U.S., the Biden administration has embraced the Republican slogan “drill, baby, drill,” Europe is set on building new gas pipelines and import facilities, and China plans to boost coal production capacity. Can you comment on the implications of these unfortunate developments and explain why short-term thinking continues to prevail among world leaders even at a time when humanity could be on the brink of an existential threat?*

Noam Chomsky: The last question is not new. In one or another form, it has arisen throughout history.

Take one case that has been

extensively studied: Why did political leaders go to war in 1914, supremely confident of their own righteousness? And why did the most prominent intellectuals in every warring country line up with passionate enthusiasm in support of their own state—apart from a handful of dissidents, the most prominent of whom were jailed (Bertrand Russell, Eugene Debs, Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht)? It wasn't a terminal crisis, but it was serious enough.

The pattern goes far back in history. And it continues with little change after August 6, 1945, when we learned that human intelligence had risen to the level where it soon would be able to exterminate everything.

The policy of escalating the war in Ukraine, instead of trying to take steps to end it, has a horrific impact far beyond Ukraine. Perpetuation of the war is, simply, a program of mass murder throughout much of the Global South.

Observing the pattern closely, over the years, a basic conclusion seems to me to emerge clearly: Whatever is driving policy, it is not security—at least, security of the population. That is at best a marginal concern. That holds for existential threats as well. We have to look elsewhere.

A good starting point, I think, is what seems to me to

be the best-established principle of international relations theory: Adam Smith's observation that the “Masters of Mankind”—in his day the merchants and manufacturers of England—are the “principal architects of [state] policy.” They use their power to ensure that their own interests “are most peculiarly attended to” no matter how “grievous” the effects on others, including the people of England, but most brutally the victims of the “savage injustice of the Europeans.” His particular target was British savagery in India, then in its early stages, already horrifying enough.

Nothing much changes when the crises become existential. Short-term interests prevail. The logic is clear in competitive systems, like unregulated markets. Those who do not play the game are soon out of it. Competition among the “principal architects of policy” in the state system has somewhat similar properties, but we should bear in mind that security of the population is far from a guiding principle, as the record shows all too clearly.

You are quite right about the horrific impact of the criminal Russian invasion of Ukraine. Discussion in the U.S. and Europe focuses on the suffering in Ukraine itself, quite reasonably, while also applauding our policy of

accelerating the misery, not so reasonably. I'll return to that.

The policy of escalating the war in Ukraine, instead of trying to take steps to end it, has a horrific impact far beyond Ukraine. As widely reported, Ukraine and Russia are major food exporters. The war has cut off food supplies to populations in desperate need, particularly in Africa and Asia.

Take just one example, the world's worst humanitarian crisis according to the UN: Yemen. Over 2 million children face imminent starvation, the World Food Program reports. Almost 100 percent of cereal [is imported] “with Russia and Ukraine accounting for the largest share of wheat and wheat products (42%),” in addition to re-exported flour and processed wheat from the same region.

The crisis extends far beyond. Let's try to be honest about it: Perpetuation of the war is, simply, a program of mass murder throughout much of the Global South.

That's the least of it. There are discussions in purportedly serious journals about how the U.S. can win a nuclear war with Russia. Such discussions verge on criminal insanity. And, unfortunately, U.S.-NATO policies provide many possible scenarios for quick termination of human society. To take just one, Pu-

tin has so far refrained from attacking the supply lines sending heavy weapons to Ukraine. It won't be a great surprise if that restraint ends, bringing Russia and NATO close to direct conflict, with an easy path to tit-for-tat escalation that could well lead to a quick goodbye.

More likely, in fact highly probable, is slower death through poisoning of the planet. The most recent IPCC report made it crystal clear that if there is to be any hope for a livable world, we must stop using fossil fuels right now, proceeding steadily until they are soon eliminated. As you point out, the effect of the ongoing war is to end the far-too-limited initiatives underway, indeed to reverse them and to accelerate the race to suicide.

There is, naturally, great joy in the executive offices of the corporations dedicated to destroying human life on Earth. Now they are not only freed from constraints and from the carping of annoying environmentalists, but they are lauded for saving the civilization that they are now encouraged to destroy even more expeditiously. Arms producers share their euphoria about the opportunities offered by the continuing conflict. They are now encouraged to waste scarce resources that are desperately needed for humane

and constructive purposes. And like their partners in mass destruction, the fossil fuel corporations, they are raking in taxpayer dollars.

What could be better, or from a different perspective, more insane? We would do well to recall President Dwight D. Eisenhower's words in his “Cross of Iron” speech in 1953: “Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies, in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. The cost of one modern heavy bomber is this: a modern brick school in more than 30 cities. It is two electric power plants, each serving a town of 60,000 population. It is two fine, fully equipped hospitals. It is some fifty miles of concrete pavement. We pay for a single fighter with a half-million bushels of wheat. We pay for a single destroyer with new homes that could have housed more than 8,000 people.... This is not a way of life at all, in any true sense. Under the cloud of threatening war, it is humanity hanging from a cross of iron.”

These words could hardly be more appropriate today.

Let's return to why "world leaders" pursue this mad course. First, let's see if we can find any who deserve the appellation, except in irony.

If there were any, they would be devoting themselves to bringing the conflict to an end in the only way possible: by diplomacy and statecraft. The general outlines of a political settlement have long been understood. We have discussed them before and have also documented the dedication of the U.S. (with NATO in tow) to undermine the possibility of a diplomatic settlement, quite openly, and with pride. There should be no need to review the dismal record again.

A common refrain is that "Mad Vlad" is so insane, and so immersed in wild dreams of reconstructing an empire and maybe conquering the world, that there's no point even listening to what Russians are saying—that is, if you can evade U.S. censorship and find some snippets on Indian state TV or Middle East media. And there is surely no need to contemplate diplomatic engagement with such a creature. Therefore, let's not even explore the only possibility for ending the horror and just continue to escalate it, no matter what the consequences for Ukrainians and the world.

Western leaders, and much

of the political class, are now consumed with two major ideas: The first is that Russian military force is so overwhelming that it may soon seek to conquer Western Europe, or even beyond. Thus, we have to "fight Russia over there" (with Ukrainian bodies) so that "we don't have to fight Russia here" in Washington, D.C., or so we are warned by House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence Chair Adam Schiff, a Democrat.

The second is that Russian military force has been shown to be a paper tiger, so incompetent and frail, and so poorly led, that it can't conquer cities a few kilometers from its border defended largely by a citizens' army.

The latter thought is the object of much gloating. The former inspires terror in our hearts.

Orwell defined "doublethink" as the capacity to hold two contradictory ideas in mind and to believe them both, a malady only imaginable in ultra-totalitarian states.

Adopting the first idea, we must arm ourselves to the teeth to protect ourselves from the demonic plans of the paper tiger, even though Russian military spending is a fraction of NATO's, even excluding the U.S. Those suffering memory loss will be

delighted that Germany has finally gotten the word, and may soon surpass Russia in military spending. Now Putin will have to think twice before conquering western Europe.

To repeat the obvious, the war in Ukraine can end with a diplomatic settlement, or with the defeat of one side, either quickly or in prolonged agony. Diplomacy, by definition, is a give-and-take affair. Each side must accept it. It follows that in a diplomatic settlement, Putin must be offered some escape hatch.

We either accept the first option, or we reject it. That at least is not controversial. If we reject it, we are choosing the second option. Since that is the near-universal preference in Western discourse, and continues to be U.S. policy, let's consider what it entails.

The answer is straightforward: The decision to reject diplomacy means that we will engage in an experiment to see whether the irrational mad dog will slink away quietly in total defeat, or whether he will use the means that he certainly has to destroy Ukraine and set the stage for terminal war.

And while conducting this grotesque experiment with the lives of Ukrainians, we will ensure that millions starve from the food crisis,

we will toy with the possibility of nuclear war, and we will race on enthusiastically to destroying the environment that sustains life.

It is of course conceivable that Putin will just surrender, and that he'll refrain from using the forces at his command. And perhaps we can simply laugh off the prospects of resort to nuclear weapons. Conceivable, but what kind of person would be willing to take that gamble?

The answer is: Western leaders, quite explicitly, along with the political class. That has been obvious for years, even stated officially. And to make sure that all understand, the position was forcefully reiterated in April at the first monthly meeting of the "Contact Group," which includes NATO and partner countries. The meeting was not held at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. Rather, all pretenses were dropped, and it was held at the U.S. Ramstein Air Base in Germany; technically German territory, but in the real world belonging to the U.S.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin opened the meeting by declaring that "Ukraine clearly believes it can win and so does everyone here." Therefore, the assembled dignitaries should have no hesitation in pouring advanced weapons into Ukraine and persisting in

the other programs, proudly announced, to bring Ukraine effectively within the NATO system. In their wisdom, the attending dignitaries and their leader guarantee that Putin will not react in ways they all know he can.

The record of military planning for many years, in fact centuries, indicates that "everyone here" may indeed hold these remarkable beliefs. Whether they do or not, they are, clearly, willing to carry out the experiment with the lives of Ukrainians and the future of life on Earth.

Since we are assured on this high authority that Russia will passively observe all of this with no reaction, we can take further steps to "integrate Ukraine into NATO de facto," in accord with the goals of the Ukrainian defense ministry, establishing "full compatibility of the Ukrainian army with the armies of NATO countries"—thereby also guaranteeing that no diplomatic settlement can be reached with any Russian government, unless Russia is somehow turned into a U.S. satellite.

Current U.S. policy calls for a long war to "weaken Russia" and ensure its total defeat. The policy is very similar to the Afghan model of the 1980s, which is, in fact, now explicitly advocated in high places; by former Secre-

tary of State Hillary Clinton, for example.

Since that is close to current U.S. policy, even a working model, it is worthwhile to look at what actually happened in Afghanistan in the 1980s when Russia invaded. Fortunately, we now have a detailed and authoritative account by Diego Cordovez, who directed the successful UN programs that ended the war, and the distinguished journalist and scholar Selig Harrison, who has extensive experience in the region.

The Cordovez-Harrison analysis completely overthrows the received version. They demonstrate that the war was ended by careful UN-run diplomacy, not by military force. Soviet military forces were fully capable of continuing the war. The U.S. policy of mobilizing and funding the most extremist radical Islamists to fight the Russians amounted to "fighting to the last Afghan," they conclude, in a proxy war to weaken the Soviet Union. "The United States did its best to prevent the emergence of a U.N. role," that is, the careful diplomatic efforts that ended the war.

U.S. policy apparently delayed the Russian withdrawal that had been contemplated from shortly after the invasion—which, they show, had limited objectives, with no

resemblance to the awesome goals of world conquest that were conjured up in U.S. propaganda. “The Soviet invasion was clearly not the first step in an expansionist master plan of a united leadership,” Harrison writes, confirming the conclusions of historian David Gibbs based on released Soviet archives.

The chief CIA officer in Islamabad, who ran the operations directly, put the main point simply: The goal was to kill Russian soldiers—to give Russia their Vietnam, as proclaimed by high U.S. officials, revealing the colossal inability to understand anything about Indochina that was the hallmark of U.S. policy for decades of slaughter and destruction.

Cordovez-Harrison wrote that the U.S. government “was divided from the start between ‘bleeders,’ who wanted to keep Soviet forces pinned down in Afghanistan and thus to avenge Vietnam, and ‘dealers,’ who wanted to compel their withdrawal through a combination of diplomacy and military pressure.” It’s a distinction that shows up very often. The bleeders usually win, causing immense damage. For “the decider,” to borrow W. Bush’s self-description, it is safer to look tough than to appear to be too soft.

Afghanistan is a case in

point. In the Carter administration, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance was a dealer, who suggested far-reaching compromises that would have almost certainly prevented, or at least sharply curtailed, what was intended to be a limited intervention. National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski was the bleeder, intent on avenging Vietnam, whatever that meant in his confused world view, and killing Russians, something he understood very well, and relished.

Brzezinski prevailed. He convinced Carter to send arms to the opposition that was seeking to overthrow the pro-Russian government, anticipating that the Russians would be drawn into a Vietnam-style quagmire. When it happened, he could barely contain his delight. When asked later whether he had any regrets, he dismissed the question as ridiculous. His success in drawing Russia into the Afghan trap, he claimed, was responsible for the collapse of the Soviet empire and ending the Cold War—mostly nonsense. And who cares if it harmed “some agitated Muslims,” like the million cadavers, putting aside such incidentals as the devastation of Afghanistan, and the rise of radical Islam.

The Afghan analogy is being publicly advocated today,

and more importantly, is being implemented in policy.

The dealer-bleeder distinction is nothing new in foreign policy circles. A famous example from the early days of the Cold War is the conflict between George Kennan (a dealer) and Paul Nitze (a bleeder), won by Nitze, laying the basis for many years of brutality and near destruction. Cordovez-Harrison explicitly endorse Kennan’s approach, with ample evidence.

An example close to Vance-Brzezinski is the conflict between Secretary of State William Rogers (a dealer) and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger (a bleeder) over Middle East Policy in the Richard Nixon years. Rogers proposed reasonable diplomatic solutions to the Israel-Arab conflict. Kissinger, whose ignorance of the region was monumental, insisted on confrontation, leading to the 1973 war, a close call for Israel with a serious threat of nuclear war.

These conflicts are perennial, almost. Today there are only bleeders in high places. They have gone as far as to enact a huge Lend Lease Act for Ukraine, passed almost unanimously. The terminology is designed to evoke the memory of the enormous Lend-Lease program that brought the U.S. into the European war (as intended)

and linked the European and Asian conflicts into a World War (unintended). “Lend Lease tied together the separate struggles in Europe and Asia to create by the end of 1941 what we properly call World War II,” writes Adam Tooze. Is that what we want in today’s quite different circumstances?

If that is what we want, as seems to be the case, let us at least reflect on what it entails. That is important enough to repeat.

It entails that we reject out of hand the kind of diplomatic initiatives that in reality ended the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, despite U.S. efforts to impede them. We therefore undertake an experiment to see whether integration of Ukraine into NATO, total defeat of Russia in Ukraine, and further moves to “weaken Russia,” will be observed passively by the Russian leadership, or whether they will resort to the means of violence they unquestionably possess to devastate Ukraine and set the stage for possible general war.

Meanwhile, by extending the conflict instead of seeking to end it, we impose severe costs on Ukrainians, drive millions of people to death by starvation, hurtle the burning planet even more rapidly to the sixth mass extinction, and—if we are lucky—es-

cape terminal war.

No problem, the government and political class tell us. The experiment carries no risk because the Russian leadership is sure to accept all of this with equanimity, passing quietly into the ash heap of history. As for the “collateral damage,” they can join the ranks of Brzezinski’s “agitated Muslims.” To borrow the phrase made famous by Madeleine Albright: “This is a very hard choice, but the price—we think the price is worth it.”

Let’s at least have the honesty to recognize what we are doing, eyes open.

Global emissions rose to record high in 2021, so the world went back to a “business-as-usual” approach once the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic subsided—for now. How hardwired is human behavior? Are we capable of having moral duties toward future people?

It is a deep question, the most important question we can contemplate. The answer is unknown. It may be helpful to think about it in a broader context.

Consider Enrico Fermi’s famous paradox: In simple words, where are they? A distinguished astrophysicist, Fermi knew that there are a huge number of planets with-

in the reach of potential contact that have the conditions to sustain life and higher intelligence. But with the most assiduous search, we can find no trace of their existence. So where are they?

One response that has been seriously proposed, and cannot be dismissed, is that higher intelligence has developed innumerable times, but has proven to be lethal: It discovered the means for self-annihilation but did not develop the moral capacity to prevent it. Perhaps that is even an inherent feature of what we call “higher intelligence.”

We are now engaged in an experiment to determine whether this grim principle holds of modern humans, a very recent arrival on Earth, some 200,000-300,000 years ago, a flick of an eye in evolutionary time. There is not much time to find the answer—or more precisely, to determine the answer, as we will do, one way or the other. That is unavoidable. We will either act to show that our moral capacity reaches as far as to control our technical capacity to destroy, or that it does not.

An extraterrestrial observer, if there were one, would unfortunately conclude that the gap is too immense to prevent species suicide, and with it the sixth mass extinction. But it could be mistaken.

That decision is in our hands.

There is a rough measure of the gap between capacity to destroy and capacity to contain that death wish: the Doomsday Clock of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists. The distance of the hands from midnight can be regarded as an indication of the gap. In 1953, when the U.S. and Soviet Union exploded thermonuclear weapons, the minute-hand was set to two minutes to midnight. It did not reach that point again until Donald Trump's term in office. In his last year, the analysts abandoned minutes and switched to seconds: 100 seconds to midnight, where the clock now stands. Next January it will be set again. It's not hard to make a case that the second-hand should move closer to midnight.

The grim question arose with brilliant clarity on August 6, 1945. That day provided two lessons: 1.) human intelligence, in its glory, was approaching the capacity to destroy everything, an achievement reached in 1953; and 2.) human moral capacity lagged far behind. Few even cared, as people of my age will remember very well. Viewing the hideous experiment to which we are enthusiastically committed today, and what it entails, it is hard to see improvement, to put it mildly.

That doesn't answer the question. We know far too little to answer it. We can only observe closely the one case of "higher intelligence" that we know of, and ask what it suggests about the answer.

Far more importantly, we can act to determine the answer. It is within our power to bring about the answer that we all hope for, but there is no time to waste. **Z**

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Eve's choice: Patriarchy no longer rules

By Robert C. Koehler

“Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’” — Genesis 2:18. RSV

One chapter later, after Eve was held responsible for the First Sin (Adam, the submissive male, just did what she told him to), we have this: “To the woman he said, ‘I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be contrary for your husband, and he shall rule over you.’” — Genesis 3:16

Some people are able to liberate the creation story from its theological misogyny, but for most believers (especially the male ones), it's pretty clear: Women are commanded, indeed, they were created, to do what they're told. This is our cultural infrastructure—a.k.a., the patriarchy—10,000 or so years in the making.

The prejudice leaps into the New Testament (“Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness.” — I

Timothy 2:11), and on and on. Thirteen hundred years later, here's Thomas Aquinas, high-fiving Aristotle, agreeing that a woman is a “misbegotten male.” Jump forward another seven centuries and we get SCOTUS Judge Samuel Alito: “Roe was egregiously wrong from the start. Its reasoning was exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences. And far from bringing about a national settlement of the abortion issue, Roe and (Planned Parenthood v. Casey) have enflamed debate and deepened division.”

As everyone knows at this point, a woman's right to an abortion—a woman's right to be in full control of her own body—is now in jeopardy. This is a terrifying possibility. If the Supreme Court overthrows *Roe v. Wade*, the legality of abortion will be decided state by state, and at this point more than half of them are ready to pass legislation turning it back into a crime. Oklahoma, for instance, just passed a law making abortion illegal after about six weeks (when cardiac activity can be detected in the embryo)—with no exceptions for rape or incest.

“Yes, I'm angry,” writes Elizabeth Warren.

“I'm angry at the justices who deliberately deceived the American people. I'm

angry at the Republicans in Congress who stole two Supreme Court seats to get us to this day. And I'm angry at the cruelty of the anti-abortion politicians who will impose enormous pain, suffering, and possible death on people who have the fewest resources to fight back.”

The passage of *Roe v. Wade* in 1973 was a direct undoing of the infrastructure of patriarchy: male rule, female submissiveness. It dug to the core of who we are and began creating change at, perhaps, the deepest level of being human.

Playwright Eve Ensler (also known as V) puts it this way: Overturning *Roe* “will catalyze and amplify the right-wing misogynist project that is taking away the rights of women everywhere. . . . If we allow the erasure of this central right for women, it will escalate the erasure of them all.

“... this is not about babies, it is about destroying women's agency and autonomy. And we know that this will most harshly affect the lives of Black and Brown women and marginalized people”—that is to say, those without the resources to travel long distances for an abortion.

In short, this is a complex combo of racism, sexism and God. It's not an issue to be solved with simplistic, “pro-

life” self-righteousness. I honor and value all who are truly pro-life—who stand against trillion-dollar military budgets, a nuclear-armed planet, poverty and starvation—but: “. . . these self-styled pro-lifers don't seem to care much about ‘life, once a baby is born,’” Jill Filipovic wrote three years ago at *The Guardian*, in reference to Donald Trump's supporters.

“They want to cut aid to needy children and healthcare to poor mothers and pregnant women. They oppose contraception and sex education—the most effective ways to reduce the abortion rate. Many of them continue to support a president who separates small children from their parents and keeps them in squalid cages.”

They saw in Trump, she wrote, “a kindred spirit who would work for their interests—their primary interest being a symbolic reassertion of their cultural dominance.”

But cultural—patriarchal—dominance is at the end of its reign, with or without *Roe v. Wade*. Of course, if the leaked SCOTUS draft holds and *Roe* is overturned, if legal abortion turns into a patchwork right across the national landscape, chaos will ensue.

“There will be marching, demonstrations, sit-ins, petitions,” writes Robin Morgan.

“Women will go ahead and disobey the law. What are they going to do when half the population is in revolt? Not 20 percent, not the ultra right wing, not the evangelicals. Women are going to control what happens to our own bodies. No matter how many thousands of us have to go to jail. We are not turning back the clock. No way.”
Z

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